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Cleveland Orchestra, Gordon Square unite for an evening of Mahler, world music, and rock

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Zachary Lewis, The Plain Dealer
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Roger Mastroianni

Pinchas Steinberg conducts a 2005 performance with the Cleveland Orchestra. The maestro returns to Severance Hall this week to lead a program featuring Mahler's Symphony No. 1 and Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto.

A few days ago, Pinchas Steinberg was Turin, Italy, conducting a popular production of Puccini's "Madame Butterfly." So successful was the run, in fact, that the presenter, Teatro Regio, added a performance to satisfy demand.

Something similar is about to befall Steinberg this weekend at the Cleveland Orchestra. Concerts haven't yet sold out, but a special arrangement surrounding his concert Friday already has prompted the rental of an additional bus to transport patrons back and forth between Severance Hall and a West-side establishment known as **Happy Dog**.

It's called "**Gordon Square Goes to the Orchestra,**" and it's got everyone from presenters and community activists to the conductor himself buzzing.

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"This is the kind of thing that happens when you get excited about an area," said Joy Roller, executive director of Cleveland's Gordon Square Arts District, a partner in the project. "We're knitting the city together."

The arrangement centers on the orchestra's upcoming "Fridays @ 7" concert, featuring Steinberg conducting Mahler's Symphony No. 1 -- one of the composer's most readily accessible symphonies -- and the overture to Nicolai's "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

That night, there's also pre-concert music by bansuri bamboo flutist **Steve Gorn** and tabla player **Hom Nath Upadhyaya**, and a post-concert show by the **New York Gypsy All-Stars**, led by clarinetist Ismail Lumanovski.

Concerts Thursday and Saturday follow a traditional format, without the post-concert show, and include another clarinet virtuoso, principal clarinetist Franklin Cohen, performing Carl Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto, a work he described in a written program note as "a portrait of a very complete person, someone who's lived and experienced all that life has to offer."

PREVIEW

Cleveland Orchestra

What: Pinchas Steinberg conducts works by Nicolai, Nielsen, and Mahler

When: 8 p.m. Dec. 2 and Dec. 4, and 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 3.

Where: Severance Hall, 11001 Euclid Ave., Cleveland.

Tickets: \$25-\$117. 216-231-1111 or the orchestra's [Web site](#).

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Essentially, the Happy Dog arrangement is an audience exchange, through which patrons who buy in (for \$25, using promo code 8795) can begin or end their evenings at Happy Dog or Severance Hall. Either way, they'll be transported back and forth between destinations, and they'll experience both classical and rock music.

Bus service to Severance leaves Happy Dog (5801 Detroit Ave., Cleveland) at 6 p.m., and after the 7 p.m. orchestra concert, patrons can be shuttled back to Happy Dog to hear the Tadpoles and **reclusive singer-songwriter Bill Fox**. The last bus back to Severance leaves at midnight.



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Joshua Gunter,
The PD

A happy crowd at the Happy Dog, courtesy of musicians from the Cleveland Orchestra. This Friday, listeners are being encouraged to attend concerts at both Severance Hall and Happy Dog in the same evening.

"Bill's sound is more accessible, but it's still amazing rock-n-roll, and it's Cleveland," said Sean Watterson, co-owner of Happy Dog and author of the exchange, explaining his selection of Fox. "It's a combination of being accessible and the best of what we've got to offer."

Watterson didn't come up with the exchange out of nowhere. The arrangement stems from the still-blossoming relationship between the orchestra and Happy Dog through which members of the orchestra have been performing classical music in the laid-back setting of the bar.

The idea also builds on Watterson's **often-expressed desire** to link the institutions of University Circle with those of his neighborhood, Gordon Square.

"We just sat at the bar and talked about how we can keep innovating," he said. "We wanted to keep the momentum going, and this kind of

jelled."

For his part, Steinberg said he's glad to be back in Northeast Ohio, whatever the circumstances, even after the success in Turin. "Every time I say the same thing," he said. "Cleveland is my favorite orchestra. And I mean it. They are the Rolls-Royce of orchestras."

But it's not just the prospect of driving a powerful musical vehicle that's got Steinberg excited. A devotee of Mahler, he's looking forward to re-entering the composer's fastidiously detailed world and especially to re-exploring Symphony No. 1, a work steeped in vocal and folk music.

As for the occasion of "Fridays @ 7" and the partnership with Happy Dog, Steinberg said he's delighted not only to be involved but to have an opportunity to hook new listeners on Mahler.

"You have to get the people close to you, so they open their ears and their hearts," he said. "The only thing you can do is give such a convincing performance that they cannot *not* listen to it. You grab them and they say 'Wow.' Then I win."

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